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In the Field

Caring for animals in the pasture: the children.
Plowing: the father or oldest son.
Sowing: the father or oldest son.
Hoeing the corn: unmarried daughter or housewife.
Harvesting the grain: the whole family.
Threshing the grain: the whole family.
Saving the seed for next year: no one in particular.

At the Market

Selling butter, eggs, poultry, vegetables: the housewife.
Selling sheep, pigs, and other animals: the men.
Buying the necessities from Sofia: the men.
Buying necessities in the village: the women and children.
Keeping the cash box: the father; in rare cases, the mother.

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It can be seen that children as well as the adults shared in this specialization of labor. The chief occupation of those below sixteen was the care of the animals. During the pasturing season these children spent more time in the fields than in the village. Because their pastures joined they were able to get together for group games and still keep a watchful eye upon their animals. The work they were called upon to do was not dangerous, but it was time consuming. Many famous men who grew up in the villages looked back upon this pastoral experience as a childhood heaven-on-earth. Some of the old men, recalling the days when the large joint families *(zadrugi)* still existed, told of being sent with the animals up the mountains a long way from the village. For a month they were absent, seeing no one but a few strangers who happened to pass by. But those distant pastures were no longer available to the peasants, so they kept their animals (and children) close to the village.

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Whether this seems exploitation or not is a matter of definition, but custom did decree that there should be no idle hands in the village economy, even to the extent of keeping small children occupied. To be sure, the attitude toward labor was changing, but the love of the land persisted, and owning land meant working that land, at least in

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582 married in Dragalevtsy. Because she had a physical deformity her
208 parents had given up all hope of marrying her off since they knew she would be unable to attend properly to her housework and field work. During the first World War there were two old maids in the village who had not been chosen for marriage because each of them had a goiter. A doctor with the German forces cured the goiters
[554] and these two unmarried women became desirable prospects, one of them marrying a priest's son in Sofia, one of the highest prizes a village girl could capture in her matrimonial venture.

[508] Since public opinion made life miserable for unmarried women,
[562] even a girl of independent temperament looked upon marriage as an inevitable event, especially if she stayed in the village. With men it
581 was different. They could choose to remain unmarried and not lose prestige in the community. People only said: "Well, Asen simply doesn't want to marry. He's a bit shy of skirts, you know."

The young men to whom I talked were outspoken in regard to those qualities which they looked for in choosing a mate: good health, industry, efficiency in the house and field, and proper care of the person. The girls, on the other hand, had little to say regarding the qualities they wanted in a husband. They seemed willing to accept whatever luck brought them. But marry they must.

584 There were many ways in which the husbands and wives had
574 become acquainted with each other. If both had been born in
883 Dragalevtsy, as was the case with a little more than half the couples, they were already aware of the other's characteristics either through personal acquaintance or hearsay. Many of the married couples had played together as children while tending the cattle in the sun-drenched pastures, only to become distant until most of the adolescent period passed. Then began frequent meetings at the fountain at sunset, shy flirtation at the *horo* and *sedenki*, or rambling conversation on the way to and from the Friday market. At the *sedenki*, held by the young people in various girls' homes on winter evenings, games involving forfeits were played. At one *sedenka* I attended, the girl giving out the penalties sent a couple obviously in love to the dark outdoors "to see what the weather was like." A few minutes later she sent a second couple out to see where the first had gone. All four of the

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young people came back giggling with excitement. Only in some rare instances had shyness kept the young couple apart in the village until matchmaking elders brought them together on the wedding day.

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Old and young alike agreed as to the importance of the *sedenka* as a boy-meet-girl occasion. Even some of the intelligentsia with a nostalgia for the simplicity of their early years in the village talked fondly of these groups in which young people whiled away many hours in common work and merriment. The *sedenka* was the Bulgarian counterpart of our pioneer cornhusking and quilting bee. There, romance as it existed in the hearts of the peasant boys and girls came to the surface and was expressed in such simple acts as the giving of a flower, the kissing of a hand or cheek. These groups, which met in fall and winter, consisted early in the evening only of girls who had been especially invited by the hostess one or two days ahead of time. Two or three hours before the *sedenka* was to begin the girl doing the entertaining had to put on her heavy *kozhuh* and again tour the neighborhood to extend a formal invitation to each guest. When the girls had gathered they immediately began to spin, since work was the pretext for coming together. Sometimes the guests brought their own work, and sometimes they assisted the hostess in carding or spinning her wool. If spinning was the order of the evening, each girl was supposed to average about a pound of rather coarse thread.

As the door was usually locked after the girls were inside, the boys, whose arrival was announced by the barking dogs, had to knock for admittance. The hostess then asked who was knocking, and one of the boys told his name.

"The girls and even the hostess know with which boys he associates and if there is any one of them who is undesirable to some or all the girls, then none of the boys is allowed to enter. Usually, however, if they open to the boys, they will open to all; but if they are not in a good mood [very rarely] then they do not open to any."

A gust of cold, fresh air accompanied the boys' entrance, and activities inside ceased until they had made the rounds, shaking hands with those present. After much squeezing and adjusting each boy found a place to sit, usually next to the girl known to be his favorite.

The coming of the boys might or might not stop the work. Quite

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The coming of the boys might not stop the work.[1] Quite
584 often the girls were able to accomplish a great deal in spite of the
574 boys, but usually the entertainment which began soon after the boys
883 arrived distracted the girls from their task. There was much singing.
533 Someone struck up an old ballad and others joined in. Then, after a few more ballads, someone ventured a popular song. I once asked a young woman whether she ever sang any modern songs (knowing well enough that she did). She replied:

"Yes, the Dragalevtsy girls know almost all the popular songs. They hear the boys singing them on the street or at *sedenki* and then ask some boy who is a relative to write down the words. If they see that the song is not appropriate, they will not sing it. They always learn the words of songs and never whistle or 'murmur' [hum]."

I wondered to what extent the patriotic songs in the school were replacing the folk songs. Here is what informants at one *sedenka* said:

"As soon as a girl leaves the school, she does not sing any of the songs learned in school, but starts singing again the old songs that she has learned from the old people. The boys, however, continue to sing the songs, chiefly military, learned in school."

No instrumental music was taught in the school, but the radio was beginning to have some effect on the peasants' choice of music. One man listened to the radio fifteen days, stopping almost all other activity, in order to get the words of a jazz song then popular. These he sang with great gusto to his admiring friends. Many of the young people were becoming ashamed of the old songs and told me that they were out of date. The new popular songs that they learned were contained in *Pesnopoiki* (songbooks) bought for a few cents on market days.

[535] The singing of some particularly lively tune at the evening gath-
584 erings[2] might lead to folk dancing in which both the boys and the
883 girls took part. The very foundations of the house seemed to shake as the feet shuffled in time to the music. Parlor games of various sorts, quite similar to those played at a rural church social in America, were frequently played at these *sedenki*. This meant that the girls laid aside their spinning entirely and what started out as a work-bee became entirely a social gathering.

[1] The "sedenka", or "spinning party", the Bulgarian part of an American pioneer cornhusking and quilting bee -- Analyst]

[2] The "sedenki." -- Analyst]

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Usually after midnight, the singing at the *sedenka* began to decrease in volume, conversation became dull, and the boys sensed that it was time to go. After their departure the hostess often served refreshments such as a soggy cheese pie *(banitsa)*, and the girls might or might not spend the night. The courting aspect of the gathering was emphasized by the fact that none of the married people of the household, except the mother of the girl acting as hostess, could be present. Even she was absent much of the time in some of the homes.

It was at these *sedenki* that I collected a number of village proverbs, which were a real conversational aid to young people somewhat tongue-tied in mixed company.

"A kind word opens an iron gate."

"God gives but does not drive into the stall."

"A wet person is not afraid of rain."

"Listen much, speak little."

"Short are the legs of a lie."

"Stretch out your feet according to your quilt."

"I am telling your daughter so that daughter-in-law may hear [speaking indirectly]."

"After the rain, a raincape."

"Every pear has a stem."

"Give advice freely but not money."

"The thirsty carry water."

"A dog that barks much puts a wolf in the stall."

Within recent years the *vecherinki* provided young people other means of getting acquainted. The purpose of a *vecherinka*, or evening entertainment in the schoolhouse, was not to get any work done, but to raise money for some worthy cause. The villagers bought tickets to a program of music or drama, provided by both imported and local talent. Auctions and lotteries were features of most *vecherinki*. After the program was over the people joined in dancing: first, for an hour or so, they danced the native *hora*, to be followed, when the old folks

[A "sedenka" is a spinning party — The Bulgarian counterpart of an American pioneer cornhusking and quilting bee — Analyst]

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went home, by village versions of western dances. It was a strange sensation on these occasions to see fifty young people trying to do the fox trot, when it was obvious that not more than five couples were experienced at it. But those who knew were patient with the novices. The excited faces were flushed not with the interest in learning a new step but rather with the daring of the dance's embrace. I asked quite a few of my acquaintances how they felt about these dances. Most of the older people who had seen the modern dances and many of the younger people considered them very immoral. In the words of one of these conservatives, "The boys especially are eager to learn a modern dance so that they can do very immoral things, which are very sweet for the young."

Although these evening entertainments had less importance in the social life of the people than the *sedenki* of the promenade, the villagers were proud of them as a formal medium of recreation in imitation of what one would find in a city. It was a new experience for many men to buy a ticket and be shown a seat; and such new experiences were dear to a peasant heart if they did not take him too far away from the ordinary world in which he moved. The first *vecherinka* was given in 1925. The teachers after that tried to give one or two more, but no one attended, so the practice was discontinued. In 1930, however, the *Chitalishte* (Reading Room Association) started them again, with the result that in the following years four or five were held during a winter.

Another innovation which played an important part in Dragalevtsy courtship was the Sunday afternoon promenade, which had displaced the traditional Sunday *horo*. The promenade course extended from Renaissance Square up a rocky street which bends to the left for a quarter of a mile. Here the young people in their Sunday best turned about and retraced their steps to the Square. One reason for the popularity of the promenade was its modernity; another was the absence of a church ban against it during Lent in contrast to the traditional interruption of *hora* during that seven-week period.

Even in the promenade there was no pairing off except in the case of some engaged couple. Indeed, walking in a twosome was tantamount to announcing an engagement. So village boys in twos,

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threes, and fours passed village girls locked arm in arm; appropriate (and inappropriate) comments were made as they passed. Up and down they went, greeting each other again and again, joking, blushing, laughing heartily, each wondering at the impression made upon some favorite member of the opposite sex.

These modern ways contrasted sharply with the laconic statements of those villagers who had married many years ago.

"When we grew older we began to know each other more intimately and went together for two or three years."

"We were neighbors before marriage. We met every holiday at the *boro* and in the evenings at the fountain. Our wedding festivities lasted three days."

"My wife and I knew one another as children. Outsiders urged both of us to marry, so I stole her. She would not agree to marry me until after I had stolen her."

Often the relatives of the couple involved kept saying that it would be a good thing to have the two persons married, and thus brought about a match they considered advantageous.

In Dragalevtsy human nature asserted itself in universal forms; for example, a village Lothario boasted:

"I had had thirty-five girls, and had gone 'hand-in-hand' with one for two years. But I fell in love with my wife because she was modest and had not talked to boys."

I might add here that the parents of the girl objected to the match, but only because she was taller than her suitor.

Two-fifths of the Dragalevtsy-born men, in their search for a wife, preferred the novelty that other villages afforded. More often than not a Bulgarian youth would all of a sudden get a fixed idea in his mind, "I've got to get a wife." The search was then under way. In such a state of mind the young man was not apt to wander far. The villages in their order of popularity were Boyana, Simeonovo, and Bistritsa. Only two other villages had more than four representatives among the married women. These likewise were not far away. It was significant that no man born in Dragalevtsy and currently living there had a wife born in Sofia. This meant that if a Sofia-

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such as a tourist's knickers or the cheap gay contents of the toy-sellers' pushcarts.

Each woman had something to sell: a few eggs, some blueberries picked up on the mountain, two or three chickens, a bag of peppers, strong-smelling buffalo butter, a bunch of carnations, white beans for which Dragalevtsy was especially known throughout this region, or a few walnuts. The woman's merchandise, piled on the sidewalk before her, was her excuse for coming to town.

It was around the next destination, the *Bezisten Pazar,* that fondest memories clung, because this was the spot near the Sofia flower bazaar where young people from surrounding villages went upon completing their morning duties in town. It was here that young men from one village met girls from other villages. During the afternoon, brightly dressed, giggling young couples promenaded in the sunshine while the older people, especially the men, gathered in the *"Dulgata Mehana,"* the tavern to which Dragalevtsy peasants were especially loyal. They lunched and drank, rested, and swapped their stories here. Nor was it without pride that they told how the late Fiodor Chaliapin, the celebrated opera singer, in 1934 spent a very merry evening in this same *"Dulgata Mehana."*

This weekly trip to town on Friday did surprisingly little to introduce changes to the village. Even while in the capital city, the peasants still lived in a peasant world. In the animal bazaar, for instance, there was little social conversation and little opportunity for a villager to widen his knowledge of urban life. Too often in this place he learned to distrust the city-dwellers through frequent dealings with the keen-witted, professional cattle merchant. In the mill he was still in a peasant world even though noisy machines foreign to his village ran at lightning speed. It was true that in the general market all types of Sofia citizenry passed in review, but the peasants' chief contact here was with the servant girls accompanying the housewives on the Friday shopping expedition. Even after finishing their little business in the general market, the village men and women found most enjoyment in being with other peasants. Few people of Dragalevtsy ventured on the city's main streets; even if they should have happened into a movie house, it would have been one on some

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to return or remain, the girl decided to go back to her parents. In 1937 this would have made her ineligible, in a sense, for further consideration as a wife. Now she simply explained that when the boy had asked her in advance if she would marry him she had thought that he was joking and told him "Yes," in what she considered to be a jesting manner. She was greatly surprised two weeks later to find that the boy had been serious. The whole affair turned out happily in the end because within another two weeks the young man had found a willing girl, had become engaged to her, and married her.

Another evidence that the family system was having to change to meet the stress of new times was the lack of social disapproval shown to widows and widowers who married persons previously unmarried. Heretofore, only widows and widowers could marry each other, and this was chiefly because of economic necessity. Although not yet common, it was a growing practice for a widower to take a fancy to a girl whom he later married. The age of marriage was becoming lower, dropping to 18 and 19 years for many of the couples. The engagement period still lasted only one or two weeks, a time sufficient to allow the girl to make her wedding preparations.

Accompanying these changes was a greater freedom among the young people both in relation to each other and in relation to their parents. The *sedenki* for young people followed practically the same patterns which I had previously observed but had not yet popularized the kissing games which featured *sedenki* in northern Bulgaria. Clandestine love-making was increasing as was the tendency on the part of the young people to pair off.

The changed relationship of sons to their fathers was shown by the failure of many of the sons to turn over their earnings to their parents as part of the common family treasury. Formerly more than half of the young men had followed this practice, but estimates in 1945 placed the number at approximately one out of ten.

Of especial interest was the pattern which younger couples were establishing after marriage. Whereas, ten years ago even the young wife would have given implicit obedience to her husband's orders, today many of the families were becoming equalitarian. The older women, however, still clung to the patriarchal pattern, though they

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622 668 to qualify for governmental retirement benefits and his former supporters were now a part of the opposition. Sofia, too, had a new mayor. It seemed to the village dignitary that all of his trouble was becoming a labor of love for which he would receive little financial return. Upon last report he was seeking a way out of office and was subject to a great deal of jesting in the taverns. The men all laughed one day in December, 1945, when a visitor from Sofia addressed him as "Mr. Mayor," because nobody knew at that time whether he was the mayor or not.

An office more important, however, than that of the mayor was that of the Commune Secretary. In Dragalevtsy this man was a Communist and, although he did not take the public limelight as much as a regular mayor would, he was the key person in the local government. Communist party matters frequently cleared through him, and he was in position to inform higher authorities about all phases of village government. Whereas the mayor's allegiance was primarily to the people of Dragalevtsy and secondarily to the Agrarian party, a luncheon conversation with the Secretary showed me that his loyalty was first of all to his party. Through serving it he felt he was best serving the people.

668 575 ● 883 178 Part of the secret of Communist control in the local community lay in the success which the Communists had in enlisting the aid of many of the young people. In a traditionalistic society, such as one finds in Dragalevtsy, young people have no place of importance. Prestige is reserved for the old; and wisdom is the prerogative of the aged. Therefore a young person is constantly being urged to conform; and whatever idealism may flare up within him in his late teens becomes dissipated in the face of his placid parents and the other apostles of the past. The Communists showed real insight, therefore, in their glorification of the young people, in giving them a place in the sun, as it were. One of the first things they did was to get control of the *Chitalishte,* or Reading-Room Association, and use that as the core for their young people's program. In the house just back of the *Obshtina* they set up clubrooms where members of the *RMS* (Workers Youth Union) could hold meetings, study up on party doctrines, or loaf. The members of this particular organization, although not

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representing the majority of the young people, had an increasing voice in village affairs and were aggressive in their approach to practical problems. Part of this aggressiveness was directed against the young people at that time still active in the *ZMS* (Agrarian Youth Society), which was a part of the opposition.

Another means by which the Communists gained support was in the favoritism shown to party members in the distribution of rationed articles. Just as the ward boss of an American city or the prewar mayor of Dragalevtsy learned that gratitude prompts support or that favors done call for favors in return, so the Fatherland Front made good use of its opportunities. Some of its generosity served purely political ends. The mayor of Sofia, so the Dragalevtsy peasants said, gave one million leva at Christmas time to the *Septemvriche,* or National Children's Communist Organization. Opposition groups, of course, received no such largesse.

But many of the criticisms of pork-barrel politics were due to misunderstanding. The peasants of Dragalevtsy could usually procure no clothing coupons if they had wool at home, and most of them did have a small supply which they were allowed to keep. This amount was based on family size and any surplus was requisitioned by the government. Artisans and laborers, however, who had no sheep, who worked in factories or at their trade, received the clothing coupons, for that was the only way they had of obtaining wearing apparel. Wool and cotton, thread, and goods were still so scarce in both villages and cities that no one group was content with what it had, and peasants were inclined to ascribe whatever others received as due to favoritism rather than the merits of the case. The proof that wool was scarce was the relative inactivity of the carding and spinning *sedenki,* the working bees so popular among the women.

"Why don't you have *sedenki* now," I asked.

"We have no wool to work," was the plausible answer.

Communist party members who used their political standing for self-aggrandizement and enrichment were supposed to be severely dealt with by the party authorities. One story making the rounds in Dragalevtsy had done much to discredit the Communists with those in the opposition. Since living in a Balkan village is a great deal like

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Flower bazaar and tavern: It is around the fourth destination on Fridays that fondest memories cling, because this is the spot near the Sofia flower bazaar where young people from surrounding villages go upon completing their morning duties in town. It is here that romance blossoms and young men from one village are introduced to girls from another. While the younger people are amusing themselves here the older people, especially the men, gather at the tavern called *Dulgata Mehana,* the particular establishment to which Dragalevtsy peasants are loyal.[1] They lunch and drink here, they rest here, and here they swap their stories. Nor is it without pride that they tell how Fiodor Chaliapin, the celebrated opera singer, in 1934 spent a very merry evening in this *Dulgata Mehana,* enjoying its drink and atmosphere. Seldom, however, does the peasant get to converse with the Sofia citizenry in this tavern. Here again he is in a peasant world; if he were not, he would feel decidedly uncomfortable. Should he decide to see a movie, in the afternoon he would go to a cheap theater on a side street and guffaw with his fellow peasants.[2]

2. To Serve His Country. The *trudova* system, or that of compulsory labor for the young men of Bulgaria, has received much attention in the West. It served a magnificent purpose, taking as it did young men from villages throughout the land, mixing them up in labor camps, and providing them with picks and shovels for the construction of highways, bridges, and other public works. But now the young Bulgarian citizen is given military training instead. This is not in keeping with the Treaty of Neuilly, which limited Bulgaria's armed forces to 33,000, but what nation in Europe, the Bulgarians ask, has been abiding by the treaties? The trend from *trudova* to military service is shown by the fact that in 1935 not a single youth was called from Dragalevtsy to do *trudova* service, but sixteen went to be trained as soldiers.

The effect of life in a labor camp or a military barracks upon the young men is apparent upon their return to the village. They have gone out from a family system where each member works unquestioningly as a part of the whole; they return, in spite of military discipline, often very conscious of their own individuality, and have to pass through a process of reconditioning before the early customs, habits, and patterns of thought again close in about them. However, before the returning young men are reabsorbed by the community, reverberations of struggle are felt throughout parts of the social structure. There are some who never again fall completely into line and who naturally

[1] Every village over a period of years has tended to select one tavern where peasants from that village spend their leisure time while in Sofia.

[2] Fifty-five per cent of the villagers (babies, children, and adults) have never seen a cinema. Out of 265 families reporting, *all* members of 73 families had seen a cinema; *no* members of 78 families had done so.